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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2019
TAGS: PARM MTCRE PREL TW YM
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: ELICITING YEMENI COOPERATION
FOR ARMS SMUGGLING INTERDICTION EFFORTS

REF: STATE 72112

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (S) The Ambassador delivered reftel talking points to Foreign Minister Abu Baker al-Qirbi during a July 11 meeting. The Ambassador prefaced his delivery of the points by noting that, when the subject of CENTCOM overflights of Yemeni territorial waters had first come up, the Foreign Minister had requested that we share with him the information that was the basis for our concern regarding arms smuggling from Yemen. Qirbi listened carefully as the Ambassador described weapons-smuggling networks operating from Yemen, asking for clarification of several points.

¶2. (S) The Ambassador concluded his presentation by noting the importance of identifying suspicious vessels before they sailed away from Yemen's coast and fanned out across international waters, be it the Gulf of Aden or the Red Sea, where they became more difficult to locate. The Foreign Minister's response focused on the need for continued international support for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), including measures to interdict arms shipments to insurgent groups such as al-Shabab. He noted that the ROYG has agreed to provide uniforms and equipment to the TFG police force, and commended the USG for its support for the government of Sheikh Sharief.

¶3. (S) Qirbi requested, and the Ambassador provided, clarification that our request at this time was for the ROYG to accept an inter-agency delegation to discuss the nature of the weapons-smuggling problem and means to combat it. The Ambassador added that we would be prepared to discuss ways to build the capacity of relevant ROYG security services as part of our cooperation on this issue. Qirbi promised to pass the request to the Minister of Defense for his consideration.

¶4. (S) COMMENT. Throughout the discussion, the Foreign Minister focused his remarks exclusively on Somalia, very pointedly avoiding any mention of arms flowing across the Red Sea to Sudan. This almost certainly reflects ROYG unease with the prospect of participating in interdiction efforts aimed at choking off the flow of weapons to Hamas and the Palestinian "resistance" in Gaza. It likely also points to a significant level of ROYG discomfort with the image of US military aircraft patrolling every inch of Yemen's territorial waters. Should the ROYG prove reluctant to agree to the CENTCOM initiative as it is now configured, we may need to consider narrowing the scope of the request in order to encourage a more positive response. END COMMENT.

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